[CONSTITUTION as of 1949]

Chapter VIII. The Local Organs of State Power

631 Art. 77. The organs of state power in territories, regions, autonomous regions, national areas, administrative areas, districts, cities, settlements and rural localities (stanitsas, villages, hamlets, auls) are the Soviets of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 78. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of territories, regions, national and administrative areas, districts, cities, districts in big cities, settlements and rural localities (stanitsas, villages, hamlets and auls) are elected by the working people of the respective territories, regions, national areas, administrative areas, districts, cities, settlements and rural localities for a term of two years.

Art. 79. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of territories, regions, areas, districts, cities, settlements and villages direct cultural, political and economic affairs within their territory, draw up the local budgets, direct the work of the organs of administration subordinate to them, ensure the maintenance of public order, assist in strengthening the defensive capacity of the country and ensure the observance of the laws and the protection of the rights of citizens.

Art. 80. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies adopt decisions and issue orders within the limits of the powers vested in them by the laws of the USSR, of the Russian SFSR and of the Autonomous Republic.

Art. 81. The executive and administrative organ of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies of a territory, region, national and administrative area, district, city, settlement or village is the Executive Committee elected by it, consisting of a Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, a Secretary and members.

● [623] Art. 82. The executive and administrative organ of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies (of stanitsas, hamlets and auls) in a small locality is the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the Secretary elected by the Soviet of Working People's Deputies.

Art. 83. The Executive Committee of the Soviet of Working People's Deputies of a territory, region, area, district, city, settlement or village exercises guidance in cultural, political and economic affairs within its territory on the basis of decisions taken by the corresponding Soviet of Working People's Deputies and superior state organs.

Art. 84. Sessions of territorial and regional Soviets of Working People's Deputies are convened by their respective Executive Committees not less than four times a year.

Art. 85. Sessions of district Soviets of Working People's Deputies and of the Soviets of Working People's Deputies of administrative areas are convened by their respective Executive Committees not less than six times a year.

[623] Art. 86. Sessions of city and village Soviets of Working People's Deputies are convened by their executive organs not less than once a month.

Art. 87. The Soviets of Working People's Deputies of territories, regions, national and administrative areas, districts and cities, each elect a Chairman and a Secretary for the duration of their sessions to conduct the sittings of the sessions.

[623] Art. 88. The Chairman of a village Soviet convenes the Soviet and conducts its sittings.

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class the tendency was toward the concentration of power in the hands of the more mighty princes.[13]

This concentration of power in the hands of the city plutocracy found its expression in the principle of an unanimity vote in the city assembly (*Veche*). Data on the early political and social organization of the Russian urban communities show that the unanimity in decisions was the rule. The old documents about these gatherings tell us that "what has been established by the oldest city, is maintained by its boroughs," that "all thought and spoke as one man," that "all were unanimous in the desire," and that the decision was reached "by all the oldest and all the youngest men of the assembly."[14]

But we also learn that this unopposed group consensus was achieved by means of threat and terror against all those who might show an inclination to disagree or who disagreed after the assembly had been held and after a resolution had been passed. The dissenters were often beaten with rods, despoiled of their property, or murdered. Sometimes they might escape such fate if ready to pay a fine that varied according to the rank of the dissenter. In this manner a minority, backed by physical force was able to enforce its will on the rest under the guise of "unanimity."[15]

Pressure for the unanimous consent on the part of the people was applied also in the village assemblies, and later in the land commune (*mir*). In some other customs of the Great-Russian peasantry, even in our own times, the unanimous consent was considered necessary. In marriage ceremonies, for instance, custom demanded that the bride when leaving her parental home obtain blessing from all her neighbors. There was, however, a threat against neighbors who refused their blessing. Curses were invoked against them: "Those who do not bless her, may they never marry their sons and daughters" (*Kto ne blagoslovit tomu vek sinov ne zhenit a docheri za muzh ne vdavat*).[16]

The principle of unanimity was apparently the procedure in the local assemblies of the Old-Slavonic soil cultivators of the Dnieper river basin. Such an unanimity was also practiced until our times in the Zadruga society of Croatia.[17] But in those pacific and anarchic societies the principle of unanimity was real, not

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a fiction. Lacking means of physical enforcement because of the lack of a centralized political system, common action could take place only among those who voluntarily agreed. But when small bands of mounted warriors imposed their rule over the multitudes of non-warlike peasantry, the power-oriented conquerors made use of the Old-Slavonic system of unanimity for purposes of regimentation and governmentalization from above. That is, they imposed a dictated consensus by means of force else the opposition of the peasant majority would soon have deprived the ruling minority of its power.

In this manner a number of band chieftains of nomadic origin ruled groupings of small peasant communities, in the form of manorial principalities. Each one of these local potentates, even though Slavicized in speech or born in mixed families, still exhibited extreme self-seeking characteristics and cherished personal power and aggrandizement above everything else, a tenet that had characterized his nomadic predecessors. Each, therefore, following steppe traditions, had a scheme of his own; each was interested primarily in accumulating riches for himself and his immediate family. In consequence, these local princes and their war bands constantly intrigued and fought among themselves. They also transferred their personal and factional strifes to the neighboring towns of burghers. In these squabbles and struggle for power and expansion, the feuding princes and fighting factions did not hesitate to call on the common enemies in their neighborhoods, such as the steppe marauders or the Viking pirates to come in and help them defeat their opponents.

It was in the course of such an internecine strife (*vsta rod na rod*) in Novgorod region in the middle of the ninth century that a band of Scandinavian merchant-pirates was called on to come and help one clique of native princes against the other.[18] These "Varangians" not only came in but stayed, founding later the Russian state in the Dnieper river basin, at that time the most important merchant thoroughfare in that part of the world. These Norse conquerors and state builders were soon assimilated by the natives. In the course of time a series of new principalities was formed and old factional bickerings and fratricidal warfare was renewed.[19]

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There was another official in this system of rural administration, the *pisar*, who, though only a salaried clerk, with no executive authority, frequently exerted great influence. He was usually a stranger to the commune because of his urban manners and dress. He might be a former divinity student, an army veteran, or a city clerk dismissed for inefficiency. He was ill paid as a commune clerk and inclined to make up for his low salary by accepting bribes.[8] But the real power in the village was often vested in the hands of the *uryadnik*, the village constable, who had manifold duties and many prerogatives. He tended to consider himself as Czar of the village and was inclined to be arbitrary and insolent. He often terrorized the peasants and "the government protected him in his practices, even to the point of prohibiting the newspapers from printing accounts of outrages he perpetrated."[9]

In the meantime other structural changes were taking place in the Russian village. Since earlier the landlords and now the government relied on a few peasants who controlled the mir, these often took advantage of their privileged position and tended to beguile the commune out of its best lands. Some of these people also owned taverns (*kabak*) and were money lenders and usurers. They tended to ape their masters, kept at a certain distance from other peasants and looked down upon them. Because of their greediness, misuse of power, and contemptuous attitude toward the peasants, they became known among the peasants as *miroedy* (mir-eaters) and as *kulaki* (fists).[10]

According to the established custom the decisions in the village assembly were arrived at unanimously and by acclamation. If there was a minority opinion the minority was expected to expressly or tacitly accept the view of the majority. In the Old-Slavonic village community and in the mir before serfdom a genuine unanimity rule was possible because that community was on the whole undifferentiated economically or socially, and was governed to a large extent by public consensus. But as soon as this rural community became stratified, the unanimity principle was exploited to the advantage of the dominant cliques. When serfdom was established, the unanimity principle was often employed to support the decisions and the whims of the landlords. And after emancipation, the police or an oligarchy of

[i.e. after the abolition of serfdom -- Analyst]

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623 a few kulaks were often able to force the commune members into unanimous decision by means of threats or bribing. And there was no appeal against such decisions.

565 621 154 In such circumstances many land communes tended to lose their former equalitarian and protective aspects and the peasants came to fear the mir and to feel an awe before it as much as they had a fear and awe before God and the Czar or before a stern and distant father. They feared the overwhelming power of the mir, the finality of its decision, and the lack of redress against its will They tended to identify the mir's final power with that of Almighty God. "There is no court for the mir, one God is its judge," they would say. Feeling helpless in the front of such an [156] uncontrollable power, there seemed to be nothing else for the peasants to do but to submit to its will. "One cannot argue with the mir"; "Mir will stand for itself, you cannot go against it" they would say. And since there was no other way out for one but to be a part of such an overwhelming and capricious institution the most expedient way of behavior for him was to accept it and to do as the others do. "Although bad, you cannot do without it"; "If you have to live with wolves you might as well howl as they do."[11]

621 625 156 The mir and police were empowered to interfere not only in the system of planting, sowing, and harvesting, but in family and personal affairs as well. The problems of paternal authority and filial duties, the relations between husband and wife, and between in-laws, the questions of inheritance, military conscription, and general behavior, all were within the grasp of these village authorities.[12] Just as in his own family, the rank-and-file individual was completely lost in his village commune. A rank-and-file man had the right to participate in the debates and was expected to vote unanimously for the regulations which restricted his personal and his economic freedom. He who dared to object was unprotected against the despotism and arbitrariness either of the ruling minority or of an incited mob. Thus the feelings of complete dependence upon superior powers prevailed in the community.

241 In addition, poor quality of land, lack of sufficient moisture, long and hard winters, many years of military service, low